

Harry's Rainbow Volunteer Impact Report

Harry's Rainbow is a charity dedicated to supporting children and young people who have been bereaved of a parent or sibling.

Harry's Rainbow provides various services to ensure that bereaved children are supported in the grieving process, from provision of books and resources to activities that promote wellbeing and facilitated contact with others who have also suffered bereavement to reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Volunteering is at the heart of the important work we do at Harry's Rainbow. We call our volunteers Harry's Heroes as they give up their precious time to help the charity in so many different ways. From fundraising through to facilitating our Rainbow Groups, Harry's Rainbow wouldn't be able to operate without our volunteers. We currently have around 40 regular volunteers that support our work.

We estimate that through our volunteering programme we have reduced our annual staff overhead by £10,000*. This is fantastic for the charity because it means that we can do more with the resources that we have.

But that's not all.

We were curious to find out the type of impact that volunteering had on the lives of our Harry's Heroes and how being part of something 'bigger' can also facilitate the grieving process for bereaved adults.

Our Research

Volunteering has been proven to be beneficial to individuals on a number of levels. Research by National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) found that volunteering can improve people's social connections and is positively associated with improved mental health and wellbeing. (https://www.ncvo.org.uk/images/documents/policy_and_research/Impactful-volunteering-understanding-the-impact-of-volunteering-on-volunteers.pdf, 2018)

We asked a group of 25 current and previous volunteers about their experience of volunteering with Harry's Rainbow. This report documents the findings and aims to make meaning from them.

Interesting Statistics

On average volunteers stay with us for 4 years.

Benefits of Volunteering

We asked our volunteers what benefits they felt they received for volunteering. Here were some of the responses:

"It enables me to help other families who have gone through a similar experience. It enables me to give back in the same way we were supported."

"Having lost my mum when I was 6 years old it makes me feel I'm helping others overcome grief of losing a sibling/parent."

"It inspired me to want to help more as a bereaved parent myself. It's so important to help others going through such a very hard time in their lives as we didn't have anything like this years ago and it's so vital for them to move forward."

"It's a complete pleasure to contribute to something so worthwhile"

"Volunteering for Harry's Rainbow and supporting its great mission has been a rewarding experience. The team appreciates your support and you're able to see how your work affects the charity's beneficiaries."

"Using my skills to make a difference for others is a positive experience. I enjoy being part of a team of like minded volunteers and staff who have a breadth of knowledge and experience but a shared sense of purpose."

"Makes me feel amazing knowing that I'm supporting children and their families with one of the most awful things I could imagine. The charity is amazing and I feel that they really appreciate all of their volunteers"

"I feel that I help an amazing charity support children and their families at a time they need it most. I always wanted to give something back to the community and Harry's Rainbow is the best charity I could think of to do that. The work the charity does is truly unbelievable and the team and people who make it happen are all true inspirations."

Volunteering Motivation

80% of volunteers wanted to do something good in the community
64% of volunteers felt the charity was a worthy cause
48% of volunteers experienced bereavement themselves as a child or an adult
36% of volunteers knew someone within the charity
28% of volunteers wanted to meet like minded people

Volunteering and Bereavement

We found that nearly half of the volunteers we had surveyed were motivated to volunteer for Harry's Rainbow as the result of experiencing bereavement as a child or adult.

One third of bereaved volunteers stated that volunteering for Harry's Rainbow gave them a project in which they could channel their grief to support others.

We wanted to understand the relationship between volunteering, bereavement and feelings of grief. We asked survey participants to rate the intensity of their grief at the start and end of their volunteering journey with Harry's Rainbow.

We found that intensity of grief in bereaved volunteers reduced by 29% across the period of volunteering for Harry's Rainbow.

Suzy's Story

"My husband died following a long battle with cancer. My boys were 6 and 8 at the time. I was suffering exhaustion from caring for Bob and the boys' reactions to his death and their ongoing grief. I really wasn't looking after myself very well or dealing with my own grief. I first began attending Harry's Rainbow about 2-3 years following Bob's death and really it was for the boys to spend time with other children who understood some of their difficulties at school and with life in general. A place where they didn't feel the need to explain why daddy wasn't around. In the process of trying to help them in that way, I began to make friends of my own with other parents in a situation similar to my own. It was through this kind of peer support that I began to deal with my own issues of grief. Volunteering with Harry's Rainbow for me came quite a few years after Bob's death because it was only after dealing with my own early and ongoing grief, that I felt strong enough to be able to listen and help others on their own journey. Volunteering helped me to appreciate how far we have all come as a family. It couldn't have happened without Harry's Rainbow and I wanted to be able to be that little piece of hope and help for someone who was where we were all those years ago and to help keep the cycle of help and support going."

Linda's Story

"I was 32 when I lost my daughter Emma and she was 10 months old. It was such a horrendous time in my life. I had no support or aftercare other than my family and felt very lonely and isolated as I didn't know how to channel my feelings or how to guide my other two boys. I had a breakdown many years later and had counselling which was brilliant to finally talk to someone about my locked away grief and to move on with my life. To have been part of Harry's Rainbow and to see the amazing work they do with bereaved families is just amazing and to see those families start to smile again as they try to rebuild their lives is so humbling and something I was so glad to have been part of and would have really benefited from. I also knew Harry so it was even more special."

Rachel's Story

"My husband died suddenly and unexpectedly in 2014. Our son was 6 at the time. We were told about Harry's Rainbow and attended our first group in about 2015. At the time I felt lost, my son felt like he was the only child this had happened to. Harry's Rainbow felt so accepting and welcoming. My son felt less alone. Through their support we moved through our grief journey and I got to a place where I felt I was able to give back. I did bag packing to start, then volunteered for groups. I was a buddy during covid and now work as the family liaison officer. None of this would have been possible without the constant support, understanding and compassion shown by everyone at Harry's Rainbow and I love the fact I am part of that family, passing forwards onto those who find themselves in a similar situation to mine."

Summary

Our research showed us that the impact of our work goes far beyond the children and families who access Harry's Rainbow support services. Our volunteering enables people to become part of something that helps others, that provides a space to meet other like minded people, to channel their grief into a project.

As we extend our support services we will bring more fantastic volunteers into our organisation.

We are dedicated to the safeguarding of children, young people and vulnerable adults. Our volunteers are DBS checked and receive safeguarding training as a minimum. Other courses are available depending upon the job role taken. Volunteers are encouraged to claim out of pocket expenses, receive branded uniform, can access our Rainbow Retreat at a discounted rate and are celebrated during Volunteers week as well as an invitation to our annual awards celebration.